

The Situation in Ireland

An Impartial Survey of Conditions and a Setting Forth of What the Eternal Irish Question May Bring Forth



FIELD MARSHAL
SIR JOHN FRENCH

To understand the currents that swell the tide in Ireland to-day one must know the people and the influences that have swayed them. The writer of the following article has been for more than thirty years a close student of Irish politics and has spent a great part of those years in travelling through all parts of Ireland, studying the people and the conditions. What he says now is based upon these observations.

By THOMAS MOLES.

THEOBALD
WOLFE TONE,

one of the few picturesque out of the many foolish figures in Irish revolutionary history, was born on the 20th of June a century ago. Irish conscription and Irish home rule, both on the statute books, were jettisoned by the Government on the same date in 1918. And lastly the Irish party was torpedoed in East Cavan on the 20th of June.

To set these items out in the form of a balance sheet would be to state the hopeless political insolvency of the Irish party. On the credit side is the defeat of conscription; on the debtor side are the indignation and disgust of the civilized world, save Germany (more barbarian than civilized); the loss of home rule and the deep disaster of a crushing defeat in East Cavan.

The Nationalist party staked everything on this contest. John Dillon warned the electors: "This is an election of worldwide interest, and it will affect deeply, perhaps vitally, the whole course of the Irish race and its fortunes for many years to come." It was a crucial and decisive trial of strength.

Contest Unparalleled Even in Ireland.

It was a contest unparalleled in Ireland. The leaders of the two parties meeting weekly at the anti-conscription Mansion House conference spent the rest of the week in furious denunciation of each other. For nearly three months this constituency, which had not known the luxury of a contest for twenty-five years, surrendered itself to a frenzy of patriotism and porter, with the police as intermediary. The supply of overripe tomatoes and addled eggs gave out long before the combatants on either side had wearied of their work.

The division became a cockpit in which feathers flew in all directions. The Nationalists, believing that time was on their side, refused to move for the writ authorizing the election. An independent membership ultimately discharged this formality. When the fury was at its highest the Government suddenly cast its net and swept the Sinn Fein candidate and some seventy of the leaders into prison on the charge of complicity in an Irish-German conspiracy.

It seemed a staggering blow for Sinn Fein. But "stone walls do not a prison make, nor iron bars a



RIOTING STUDENTS of the NATIONAL UNIVERSITY at A SINN FEIN MEETING in DUBLIN

cage." Griffiths in jail was at least as great a force as Griffiths at large.

The Nationalists would rather have lost any other seat in Ireland; it was one of their fortresses. The Sinn Feiners coveted East Cavan as they coveted no other constituency, because it meant a breach of the Nationalist frontier in Ulster.

Might Have Rivalled Billy Sunday.

The stormy days preceding and succeeding the death of Parnell left East Cavan untouched. The late member, Sam Young, was a wealthy man. He spent money liberally and discreetly, and his end was peace. He amassed a great fortune by distilling spirits alcoholic, and his hobby was discoursing upon spirits disembodied. As a politician he did not count, but as a theologian he might, had he chosen, have rivalled Billy Sunday.

The Sinn Fein banner floats over Breffni though the Nationalists had sworn it would never decorate the ramparts of Ulster. They fought it to the last breath, and left no artifice untried. A public meeting reminded that "the sustaining power behind Ireland was America" cheered to the echo the triumphant rejoinder, "To hell with America!"

Of the eight straight contests between Sinn Fein and Nationalism the Sinn Feiners have won five, had a walkover in a sixth and polled 4,000 more votes than their opponents. Of all the chairmen of Nationalist county councils who in the convention voted contrary to the Sinn Fein policy of complete separation, a bare half dozen have survived, three of whom were severely admonished and permitted reelection on purely personal grounds. With a knowledge stretching over thirty-two years of Irish political life and fortified by the experiences of sixty-four contested elections, I affirm that were a general election to be precipitated now not 20 per cent. of the present Irish party would be returned, and many of them would not even put up a fight.

There are in Ireland 400,000 men fit to fight for the kingdom. Belgium prostrate beneath the feet of Germany stretches out her hands and pleads with agonized gesture for help. France bleeding at every pore turns toward Ireland her bloodshot eyes and bleeding body and pleads for assistance in the name

in the interests of Germany. He declared that if the Roman Catholic Church, the Nationalist party and the Sinn Feiners had combined to defeat conscription, they had rendered Germany a priceless service, but had also dug the grave of home rule.

He asserted that "there were no grounds in logic, equity or justice why Ireland should not be called upon to bear her share of the sacrifices which other parts of the kingdom are asked to assume"; that "the Roman Catholic clergy, when they acted as they did threw down a challenge not only of obedience to the law but a direct challenge to imperial supremacy on a matter which lies within the scope of the Imperial Parliament, viz.: to raise forces for the defence of the kingdom."

They had advised their flocks under penalties of eternal damnation to resist conscription to the uttermost."

In view of all these things and because of the change of opinion brought about by them at home and across the seas, Irish home rule and Irish conscription were alike to be thrown on the scrap heap.

Policy of Concession Disastrous.

Lord Middleton, who lost the support of the whole body of southern Unionists because he had in the convention pursued a policy of concession and compromise to the point of disaster, told the Lords that while he sat in conference for months with John Redmond he would not sit with his successors, who were "every day in conference with the avowed enemies of this country and who by the common link of no conscription are taking part with men who if the Government have the evidence against them which they profess to have, and which I believe they have, ought to be shot as traitors."

How, he asked, "are we to go into conference with men who are doing their utmost to prevent Ireland taking any part in the war and avow that they prefer German to British rule in Ireland? There is not one Unionist in Ireland at this moment," he passionately declared, "who will sit in a Dublin Parliament if you could form one."

His dream is over and so is the dream of the Gov-



JOHN DILLON
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of a common faith—and pleads in vain. The church in whose very name the cry for help is uttered has counselled refusal, and left the monasteries and nunneries of stricken Belgium to the tender mercies of the Hun.

At the identical moment that the last votes were being recorded in East Cavan things were happening at Westminster. Earl Curzon gave the Government's answer to the conspiracy hatched